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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

November 22, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 5034 - UNKNOWN)
TAGS: CMGT, CVIS, KPAO
Captions: None
Subject: BIOMETRICS STIR THE POT IN THE UAE
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 05034

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: DCM
INFO: POL PAO CONS AMB
Laser1:
INFO: PAO CONS

DISSEMINATION: DCM
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: DCM:RALBRIGHT
DRAFTED: CON:TPONCE
CLEARED: CON:MMARRANO

VZCZCADI881
OO RUEHDI RUEHC RUEHXX RUCNFSC
DE RUEHAD #5034/01 3260600
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 220600Z NOV 03
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2452
RUEHDI/AMCONSUL DUBAI 3537
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUCNFSC/CFSC SA COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 005034

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR CA/FO; CA/EX; CA/VO; NEA/FO; NEA/ARP; NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [CMGT](#) [CVIS](#) [KPAO](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: BIOMETRICS STIR THE POT IN THE UAE

REFS: (A) STATE 297152

1. SUMMARY: THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND CONSULAR SECTION IN ABU DHABI HOSTED A PRESS BRIEFING ON THE FINGERPRINTING OF NIV APPLICANTS AT THE US EMBASSY. IN ADDITION, DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION (DCM) AND CONSULAR CHIEF BRIEFED THE DIRECTOR OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS AT THE UAE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MFA) ON THE NEW FINGERPRINTING PROCEDURES AT THE EMBASSY. NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED ACCURATE, INFORMATIONAL STORIES AND THE DIRECTOR OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS EXPRESSED HIS UNDERSTANDING. ALTHOUGH ONE UAE OFFICIAL HAS REFUSED TO BE FINGERPRINTED SAYING HE WAS BEING TREATED LIKE A "CRIMINAL," THE UAE'S MAJORITY THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS (TCN)

ARE TAKING IT ALL IN STRIDE, ALREADY SUBJECT TO FINGERPRINTING AND RETINAL SCANS BY THE UAE AND EMIRATE-LEVEL GOVERNMENTS. END SUMMARY.

BIOMETRICS AND MORE - A NEW BEGINNING IN THE UAE

12. BEGINNING IN OCTOBER 23, 2003, A VISITING ORKAND TEAM BEGAN INSTALLING FINGERPRINTING COLLECTION DEVICES AT THE INTERVIEW WINDOWS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CONSULAR SECTION'S ROUTINE COMPUTER UPGRADE SCHEDULE. FOLLOWING INSTALLATION, THE CONSULAR SECTION BEGAN COLLECTING FINGERPRINTS FROM THE REQUIRED NIV APPLICANTS ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2003.

13. IN RESPONSE TO STATE 297152, THE CONSULAR SECTION WORKED WITH THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION (PAS) TO INFORM THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE NEW BIOMETRIC COLLECTION PROCEDURES. TO DO SO, PAS INVITED JOURNALISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS FROM ALL UAE ENGLISH AND ARABIC DAILIES FOR A ONE-HOUR BRIEFING BY CONSULAR AND PA STAFF. UPON ARRIVAL, JOURNALISTS WERE PROVIDED ENGLISH AND ARABIC PRESS RELEASES DRAWING UPON REFTEL TALKING POINTS AND MAY 6 AND SEPTEMBER 24, 2003, CA PRESS GUIDANCE. VICE CONSUL AND PAS INFORMATION SPECIALIST THEN DEMONSTRATED THE FINGERPRINTING TECHNIQUES TO THE JOURNALISTS. JOURNALISTS VIEWED THE DEMONSTRATION TWICE - IN FRONT OF AND BEHIND THE CONSULAR WINDOW.

14. AFTER THE DEMONSTRATION, PAO AND VICE CONSUL TOOK QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS, JOURNALISTS FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON THE APPROPRIATENESS OF FINGERPRINTING AND QUESTIONED WHETHER OR NOT THE FINGERPRINTING WAS FOCUSED ON ARAB AND MUSLIM AUDIENCES. VICE CONSUL RESPONDED THAT THIS WAS NOT THE CASE, AND, AS REASSURANCE, SHOWED JOURNALISTS THE STACKS OF OLD COMPUTERS THE ORKAND TEAM HAS JUST FINISHED REPLACING WITH NEW PENTIUM IV SYSTEMS. (COMMENT: WE RECOMMEND OTHER POSTS DO THE SAME IF POSSIBLE, AS THIS SEEMED CONVINCING TO THE JOURNALISTS PRESENT. END COMMENT.)

15. ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6, JOURNALISTS PUBLISHED THEIR STORIES. ALL ARTICLES COVERED THE INFORMATION PROVIDED TO JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FINGERPRINTING SOLELY BASED ON ROUTINE MAINTENANCE SCHEDULES AND MENTIONING FRANKFURT, BRUSSELS, SAN SALVADOR, AND GUATEMALA CITY AS THE FIRST FINGERPRINTING POSTS.

UAE REACTION - IT'S NOT SO GREAT WHEN IT HAPPENS TO YOU!

16. IN A NOVEMBER 9 MEETING WITH THE DIRECTOR OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS AT THE MFA, DCM EXPLAINED THE NEW FINGERPRINTING PROCEDURES. THE DIRECTOR OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS EXPRESSED HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEED TO MOVE TOWARDS BIOMETRICS TO ENHANCE THE SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES. HE BRIEFLY COMMENTED ON THE RETINAL SCANS IN PLACE AT UAE PORTS OF ENTRY FOR CERTAIN CATEGORIES OF VISITORS TO THE UAE, IN PARTICULAR WORKERS FROM INDIA, PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH. HE EXPRESSED SATISFACTION THAT FINGERPRINTING DID NOT APPLY TO A-1 AND A-2 VISA CATEGORIES.

17. COMMENT: PUBLIC REACTION TO THE INITIATION OF FINGERPRINTING OF NIV APPLICANTS HAS BEEN MIXED. THE UAE POPULATION IS MORE DISTURBED BY THE PROSPECT OF FINGERPRINTING THAN THE UAE'S MAJORITY TCN POPULATION. CONSULAR STAFF HAVE NOT RECEIVED COMPLAINTS FROM TCN APPLICANTS, WHO HAVE THEIR FINGERPRINTS TAKEN FOR RESIDENCE VISAS AND IDS BY FEDERAL AND EMIRATE-LEVEL GOVERNMENTS. CERTAIN TCNS ARE ALSO SUBJECT TO RETINAL SCANS AT UAE AIRPORTS.

18. REACTION BY UAE NATIONALS, ON THE OTHER HAND, REMAINS MIXED. THE VAST MAJORITY OF UAE NATIONAL STUDENT AND TOURIST VISA APPLICANTS HAVE COMPLIED QUIETLY AND CALMLY WHEN REQUESTED FOR THEIR FINGERPRINTS. THE PROSPECT FOR TURMOIL WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND PROMINENT UAE NATIONALS, HOWEVER, REMAINS TO BE SEEN. ONE UAE SENIOR UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATOR OFFICIAL, THE SUBJECT OF A CLASS A VISA REFERRAL, REFUSED TO COME TO THE EMBASSY AND TOLD PAS STAFF THAT HE "WOULD NOT BE TREATED LIKE A CRIMINAL." THIS REACTION ONLY STRESSES THE CONTINUING NEED TO INFORM APPLICANTS THAT BIOMETRIC CAPTURE CAPABILITY NOT ONLY ENHANCES NATIONAL BORDER SECURITY TO THE BENEFIT OF U.S. CITIZENS

AND PERMANENT RESIDENTS, BUT INCREASES THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF
VISITORS TO THE UNITED STATES AS WELL. END COMMENT.

WAHBA